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A post-modern presidency: Clinton, the 80s and the American semiosphere

Unlike George Bush, Bill Clinton has shown no particular loyalty to his past. When pressed hard about it during the primaries, Clinton's response was, in his own campaign's words, to "reintroduce himself" at the convention. And when his wife ran into tough sledding, campaign aides composed a long memo describing how she too was to be recreated for the public.

Bush, on the other hand, is defined by his past, an aging preppie vainly and incoherently mumbling about values firmly instilled but never analyzed or reevaluated. Jim Hightower got it right: "George Bush was born on third base and thought he had hit a triple." In the end it approached parody: the repeated reference to "those bozos" and "that crazy nuclear freeze crowd," and the truncated sentences -- "Wouldn't be prudent. Don't want to do it." -- come straight from the country club bar, bullet codes exchanged by those for whom elaboration is redundant. Such things were settled at, and by, birth.

In its darkest corners Clinton's past is his enemy, something to have overcome and to overcome still. In the Clinton campaign story there was talk of family, but his mother and brother remained in the shadows. There were those older than himself who helped him on his way, such as Senator Fulbright, but they too appeared far on the periphery of his story. His most moving tale was of challenging his abusive father. His daughter is named not after a relative, but for a popular song. He has good friends, but apparently thousands of them.

On a Sunday morning in Little Rock soon after he was elected, he went to church -- but two of them, of different faiths. I read that and thought of Eddie Sullivan, mayor of Cambridge, Massachusetts, some 35 years ago. On a Sunday before election Sullivan left his Chrysler Imperial parked in front of a Catholic church for all four masses. But it was the same church.

Politics in those days was a lot about remembrance. The best politicians were those who remembered and were remembered the most -- the most people, the littlest favors, the smallest slights, the best anecdotes tying one's politics to the common memory of the constituency.

Politics was also about gratitude. Politicians were always thanking people, "without whom" whatever matter under discussion could not have happened. You not only thanked those in the room -- as many as possible by name -- you even thanked those without -- for "having prepared the wonderful meal which we have just partaken of." The politician was the creation of others, and never failed to mention it.

Above all, politics was about relationships. The politician grew organically out of a constituency and remained rooted to it as long as incumbency lasted.

Today, we increasingly elect people about whom we have little to remember, to whom we owe no gratitude and with whom we have no relationship except that formed during the carnie show we call a campaign.

A year ago at this time, few of us knew -- let alone remembered -- anything about Bill Clinton. If we were not from Arkansas, we had nothing for which to thank him. And our whirlwind relationship has been under the preeminent control of the great American matchmaker: the media. Clinton's past is not only unimportant to him, but to us as well.

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Bucking the system since 1966

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But consider the past for a moment. Part of it, insomuch as presidential politics is concerned, is simply missing. So far, no one has become president who was born between 1925 and 1945. The first of this missing presidential generation were the kids who won World War II; the last of the group voted for the first time just when Vietnam were getting serious.

There's only one other gap like this in American history. No one born between 1891 and 1907 became president either. The last of this group gained their majority just in time for the great depression.

Both groups grew up in periods of expansionism that ended with humiliating blows to America's power, in one case military, in the other case economic.

I know the later generation well; they called it the "silent" one; I was born in the middle of it. In the 1960s, when we were in our 30s, we were told that we already were too old to be trusted. It wasn't really true; in many ways the 60s was just the mass movement of the fifties. In coffee houses, music, and conscious political apathy we had laid the groundwork for rebellion.

We could be trusted. We just couldn't be counted upon. Our cultural heroes didn't man the barricades. They hit the road. Our goal wasn't to overthrow the establishment, someone would say a decade later, but to make it irrelevant. Or, like Miles Davis in concert, play with your back to it.

Some of us made Humphrey Bogart an anti-hero in part, I think, because we already suspected that America was our own Casablanca, a place of seductive illusions and baroque deceptions, where nothing was at it appeared. Bogart, with skill and cool, knew how to adapt to the chaos and deceit without betraying his own code. It was a model we needed. After all, we had been taught that if we crawled under our desks, we would be safe from The Bomb. Even our teachers lied to us.

Yet, like Rick in *Casablanca*, it never occurred to most white guys in the 50s to try to change the world. When change finally came, we did what we did best. We adapted. From conventional sex to free sex to the most cautious sex humans have ever known, we adapted. From mass movements to monomaniacal interest groups, we adapted. From integration to nationalism to political correctness, we adapted. From communes to condos, we adapted. From Beatles to rap, and from Aquarius to environmental apocalypse, we adapted. And given that it wasn't really our revolution, we did it all pretty well.

Our virtue and our failing was that we never enjoyed the hubris of those older and younger than ourselves. Our virtue because we were modest enough to actually have learned something from what happened; our failing because the footing never seemed solid enough to permit us to do much with what we had learned.

There were, of course, other things that pushed us to the sidelines, such as the rise of a politics of national nostalgia that required leaders as aged as its programs. And a revolution of values that made whatever had happened to a white man in the 1950s socially and politically irrelevant.

In our place, a gerontocracy sprung up that proved remarkably resistant. Not even the civil rights and women's movement could bring it down. In the end, it was not so much a battle over policies or program, but a struggle for power by two generations of white men of the same political pack. As in the animal pack, the younger male

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eventually won -- not in order to produce social and political change but to renew the vigor and continuity of the pack. There will be change, to be sure, but it will occur not so much because the Clinton administration desires it but because America has finally stepped into the voting booth and admitted that it has really changed.

Politics, however, always lags behind the times even when it thinks it is catching up. Phil Hart described the Senate as a place where things happened ten years after they should have and something of the sort can be expected from the Clinton administration as well. It may explain why much of it already has the smell, sound and look of the 1980s, albeit the 80s in their most elite manifestations.

The Clinton people are smart, aggressive, extremely self-assured and hard working. Perhaps most important of all, they were exceptionally successful during a decade when most Americans were not.

Clinton is part of a generation which grew up as many of the communal support systems of society were disintegrating. Family, church, and neighborhood were all on the ropes. Politics was also breaking down: not only had the machines faded, but the parties were faltering and Congress splintering.

Extraordinary national common symbols were gone as well: the Kennedys, Rev. King, and -- just as the 80s began -- John Lennon. Young America entered the decade very much alone.

Clinton's convention documentary was meant to suggest roots yet, carefully crafted as it was, there was something missing. Clinton was there and people were there, but they seemed around him, not with him. He reaches out of the crowd at Boy's Nation to touch Jack Kennedy's hand, just as this year tens of thousands reached out to touch his. A touch. A moment. A moment gone.

It is the normal work of the politician, but with Clinton there seems too much. Too many hands, too many friends, too many words, too many churches, too many hours before he goes to sleep, too many hours on C-SPAN solving the nation's problems with too many industrialists and economists -- and, in the end, too little else. It's as though he's afraid that if he went to the bathroom some voter might forget him. It's not surprising that Clinton says he wants to run his administration like a campaign. His whole life has been one.

The egocentrism of yuppie America did not spring originally from greed, but from an apparent reality; it truly seemed a struggle between oneself and the rest of the world. Quietly, and unnoticed at first, the economy was following community into disarray and a Darwinian imperative took hold.

It was, it turned out, just what rapidly changing American corporations needed, a crop of well-schooled, mobile, undistracted young warriors to boost productivity and profits. Working until early in the morning at an investment banking firm became the new machismo, so much so that in one year a majority of the graduating class of Yale attempted to pursue that course.

The purported skill of the yuppies was that they knew how to "manage" and they knew how to "communicate." They did these things so assiduously that before the decade of 80s was over, process and words appeared to have become the country's major products. With the avid assistance of the media, the 80s brought us the largest collection of euphemisms ever to invade the English language -- like *managed competition* and *investing in people.* And it brought us sly words that mean something far from what they seem to mean -- like *Progressive Policy Institute* or *national health insurance.*

It was not only our manufacturing base that eroded, our base of understanding of what we meant when we spoke to each other was in shambles as well.

Clinton is, from everything I've seen, an engaging person, who looks you straight in the eye and speaks sincerely. But the 80s were filled with constantly reiterated sincerity. There was too much of it around, too much that didn't pan out, from the waiter's hyperbolic preview describing what would turn out to be a third-rate meal to the sign on my ATM that announced that "for your convenience" the device had been moved ten blocks away. When an Arkansas union leader said that Bill Clinton will slap you on the back while he's pissing down your leg, I knew well the feeling even if I couldn't vouch for its specific applicability. It was the classic sucker punch of the 80s.

Sincerity and the stiletto. The latter occasionally appeared during the Clinton campaign. The day before the election, Clinton campaigner Paul Begala told a reporter the campaign couldn't coast, it had to "drive a stake" through the GOP's heart. And *Newsweek* reports Clinton responding to a Bush offensive by saying, "I want to put a fist halfway down their throats with this. I don't want subtlety. I want their teeth on the sidewalk."

The 80s brought us such rhetoric and it brought us leveraged buyouts that drained tax revenues and chewed up credit. Several of Clinton's key advisers have been gurus of this dubious craft. The 80s found foreign companies buying up America; several of those closest to Clinton helped make this possible.

The 80s gave great weight to analysis, but often penalized action. Those most skilled in the analytical arts found themselves moving up -- lawyers, journalists, economists and the politicians who could talk like them. The recent Clinton economic conference seemed a giant 1980s potlach ceremony -- 329 warlords of industry and academia demonstrating their power by tossing the wealth of their ideas into the bonfire. Facts were presented, alternatives proposed, concern expressed -- Clinton found one chart "very moving" -- but what finally emerged was a magnificent justification for not doing much. The problems, as always these days, are just too complex. How,

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one wonders, did FDR ever managed to fight the depression with a White House staff smaller than that now allotted the president's wife and World War II with less staff than Dan Quayle?

The 80s also taught us that all politics was office politics; voting became a personnel decision rather than an ideological or policy choice. We *hired* politicians. Clinton, like many pols reared in the 80s, is strong in skills and weak in creed. His new chief of staff is said to be "apolitical," a description used in praise. Politics without politics. He is someone who, in the words of the *Washington Post,* "is seen by most as a man without a personal or political agenda that would interfere with a successful management of the White House."

"What part of government are you interested in?" I asked a thirtysomething lawyer who was sending in his resume. "I don't have any particular interest," he replied, "I would just like to be a special assistant to someone." It no longer surprised me; it had been ten years since I met Jeff Bingaman at a party. He was in the middle of a multi-million dollar campaign for US Senate; he showed me his brochure and spoke enthusiastically of his effort. "What brings you to Washington?" I asked. "I want to find out what the issues are."

If you got the right grades at the right school and understood the "process," it didn't matter all that much what the issues were or what you believed. Issues were merely raw material to be processed by good "decision-making."

The Washington media is very comfortable with the Clinton crowd. Much of it rose in the same era, an era when "objectivity" was supposed to have adequately supplanted media competition. The journalists and the politicians share a mutual assumption that life can be distilled of the impurities of ideology, inclination, influence, faith and prejudice. Leonard Downie, executive editor of the *Washington Post,* exemplifies the new creed; he refuses to vote and asks his reporters to "cleanse their professional minds of human emotions and opinions." Non-ideology has become the great ideology of America's professional elite. It is, of course, a lie and it is also Clinton's biggest campaign promise.

In these ways, Clinton is a man of the 80s. It is, however, what the 80s didn't bring us that may cause him trouble. While the 80s literally crashed in 1987, the cultural disintegration didn't really occur until the initial graduating classes of prospective yuppies of the 90s went out and couldn't find a job. This young president, despite his saxophone and his appearances on MTV, already has a cultural gap with the young.

Even during the 80s, as a study by economist Frank Levy of MIT shows, the yuppie phenomenon was a rarified one and hardly reflected what generally happened. In the ten years ending 1989, for example, the income of male workers aged 25-34 with a college education rose 7% while those with only a high school diploma fell 15%. And Robert J. Samuelson reports that the gap between the best and the worst paid college graduates increased, as did the gap between the best and the worst paid lawyers.

The Clinton administration represents not only a new politics but a new elite. It may not be a torch that has been passed at all, but only a lamp from Bloomingdales.

What it all means is still hard to grasp but there are important clues to be found in Marshall Blonsky's remarkable *American Mythologies.* Blonsky is a semiotician, yet an unusually readable one. He describes Umberto Eco, the semiotician turned novelist, balling up a wad of paper and throwing it at a startled student.

"Is that a sign?" he asked while wadding another piece of paper.

The student nodded.

"No," said Eco. "is not a sign. That was stimulus response. Step on a dog, he barks. A stimulus is something present clashing with something else present. It's not a sign situation. This paper now" -- he raised the ball as if to throw it -- "is a sign. I am looking around with a menacing gesture, but I do not throw the ball. All of you have associated a possible consequence. The consequence didn't happen, therefore the presence of my body is a physical presence sending you back to something expected but absent. My body is a sign."

Bill Clinton, to a degree greater than any previous president, would understand not only what Eco said but how to use it. He knows that we live in a time in which the major clashes are between things that are not present. And he knows his body is a sign. Like walking up Georgia Avenue. Like going to two different churches on a Sunday. Like constantly being photographed in a warm-up suit and baseball cap. Like riding a 'bus' from Charlottesville to Washington for his Inauguration -- even though it's really a fully outfitted motor coach rather than, as columnist Tony Kornheiser put it, "891 hard miles with a warm Dr. Pepper and a stale cheese sandwich."

Other presidents have engaged in periodic symbolic extravaganzas -- Bush particularly liked military invasions in the months around Christmas -- but mostly have relied on stock symbols (the Rose Garden, the helicopter) for everyday use. Clinton, on the other hand, understands that today all power resides in symbols and devotes a phenomenal amount of time and effort to their creation, care and manipulation.

In January the co-chair of his inauguration announced that people would be encouraged to join Clinton in a walk across Memorial Bridge a few days before the swearing-in. "It signifies* the way that this president will act,"Harry Thomason said. "There are always going to be crowds, and he's always going to be among them."

Clinton is, I believe Blonsky would agree, a very post-modern man. Blonsky, in an early chapter on men's fashion, says:

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* [from the Latin word for *to show with signs*]

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High modernists believe in the ideology of style -- what is as unique as your own fingerprints, as incomparable as your own body. By contrast, postmodernism. . . sees nothing unique about us. Postmodernism regards "the individual" as a sentimental attachment, a fiction to be enclosed within quotation marks. If you're postmodern, you scarcely believe in the "right clothes" that take on your personality. You don't dress as who you are because, quite simply, you don't believe "you" are. Therefore you are indifferent to consistency and continuity.

Change the sign from clothes to politics and the 1992 campaign begins to emerge. Later, Blonsky writes, perhaps illuminating why Gennifer Flowers and the draft and ever-changing policy positions don't matter:

Character and consistency were once the most highly regarded virtue to ascribe to either friend or foe. We all strove to be perceived as consistent and in character, no matter how many shattering experiences had changed our lives or how many persons inhabited our bodies. Today, for the first time in modern times, a split of multiple personality has ceased to be an eccentric malady and becomes indispensable as we approach the turn of the century.

If Clinton is post-modern, he is in some interesting company. Such as Vanna White, of whom Ted Koppel says "Vanna leaves an intellectual vacuum, which can be filled by whatever the predisposition of the viewer happens to be." Koppel sees himself as having a similar effect and implicitly ascribes Bush's political resilience in a post-modern age to his very dullness: "You would think that the voter would become frustrated... but on the contrary he has become acclimated to the notion that you just fill in the blank." And then Koppel warns: "It is the very level of passion generated by Jesse Jackson that carries a price." Clinton understands the warning and the value of the blank the viewer can fill in at leisure.

Blonsky sums up:

Connotation today -- far beyond advertising phenomenon -- is no longer merely 'hidden persuasion' but is in fact a semiosphere, a dense atmosphere of signs triumphantly permeating all social, political, and imaginative life and, arguably, constituting our desiring selves as such.

The 80s began with the murder of John Lennon. Mark David Chapman now explains it this way: "I wasn't killing a real person. I killed an image. I killed an album cover."

Within days of the election, Ford began running a TV ad using a voice-over that sounded just like Clinton delivering a speech to an enthusiastic audience. Or was it really Clinton delivering a speech to an enthusiastic audience? Or really Clinton selling cars a few days after his election?

We have helped put Clinton in the center of this semiosphere. He knows how it works and how to work it. Do we know how to read it?

Welcome to Casablanca. -- *Sam Smith*

·THIS ADMINISTRATION IS GOING TO LOOK MORE LIKE AMERICA·

-- PRESIDENT-ELECT CLINTON

MORE THAN 50 CORPORATE JETS WERE PARKED AT LITTLE ROCK·S CENTRAL FLYING SERVICE DURING THE CLINTON ECONOMIC CONFERENCE. THAT·S ABOUT ONE CORPORATE JET FOR EVERY SEVEN PARTICIPANTS, AND DOES NOT INCLUDE JETS WAITING AT SMALLER AIRPORTS AROUND TOWN.

Altman, Roger

Named deputy treasury secretary. New York investment banker and Clinton fundraiser. Blackstone credits Altman with the completion of four of the six largest acquisitions of American firms by Japanese companies. Responsible for mergers and acquisitions at the Blackstone Group, which brokered Sony's purchase of CBS Records and Columbia Pictures. Nikko Securities owns about 20% of the firm.

Baird, Zoe

Named attorney general. Senior vice president Aetna Life & Casualty Co. Described in *Business Week* as "a party to all major policy decisions at Aetna and is shaping the insurer's stance on public issues such as health care." Formerly a lawyer for General Electric (See **Kantor**) and a member of the O'Melveny & Myers law firm (See **Christopher**)

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Bentsen, Lloyd

- Named treasury secretary. Chair of the Senate Finance Committee. Nickname: "Loophole Lloyd."
- Charles J. Dibona, president of the American Petroleum Institute, was quoted in the *Washington Post* as saying: "What he is a great American statesman. Our only wish is that he could be cloned, and I think most businesses would feel that way, not just the oil industry." The article goes on to say, "The 71-year-old self-made millionaire has spent much of his congressional career looking out for business interests. Bentsen has been an especially steady ally of the oil and gas and real estate industries."
- When he became head of the Senate Finance Committee in 1987 he invited corporate lobbyists who contributed $10,000 to his re-election campaign to monthly breakfasts. After the meetings became public -- and dubbed 'Eggs McBentsen' -- Bentsen cancelled the meetings and returned the contributions. Since 1988 he has not taken any PAC money.
- In 1986 he and Sen. David Boren led a successful fight to preserve tax breaks for the oil and gas industry in the major tax reform bill of that year.
- Bentsen resigned from three all-white clubs when he ran for vice president, an aide saying it was "the appropriate thing to do." After he lost that race, he quickly rejoined the clubs, an aide saying he thought "it would be appropriate."
- Bentsen first won his Senate seat in 1970 in a bitter primary against populist incumbent Ralph Yarborough. Bentsen attacked Senators Ed Muskie and Harold Hughes, who came to help Yarborough, as "ultra liberal' outsiders. He also ran TV spots that attempted to link Yarborough to anti-war protests.

FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES

Six of Clinton's top appointees, or their firms, have represented Japanese industries. Insurance, oil and tobacco companies are also well represented as are three of the top defense industries. Among the hundred largest economies of the world, Clinton appointees or their firms have had a business relationship with the following: Ford (ranked 23rd among world economies), Exxon (27th), General Electric (38th), Matsushita 48th), Philip Morris (53rd) and NEC(80th)

Berger, Samuel

- Named deputy national security advisor. Lawyer for Hogan & Hartson. Registered lobbyist for Caterpillar, which in April 1992 broke a 163-day strike by threatening to hire replacement workers and which has since scheduled its factory workers to involuntary 10 and 12-hour shifts. Also lobbies for Berg Steel Pipe Corporation. Has represented Poland and advised Ontario on US trade law. Has represented Timex, May Dept. Stores, and the Coalition of American Steel-Using Manufacturers. Has lobbied Congress for Toyota's US subsidiary.

Brown, Ron

- Named commerce secretary. Chair of Democratic National Committee. Represents foreign auto makers. Formerly represented government of Baby Doc Duvalier (a $150,000 contract) and has represented American Express, Japan Airlines, Oman, Zaire and Gabon. Also represented a coalition of 21 Japanese electronics producers.
- Was partner with Thomas Boggs in a waste treatment company that won a $210 million contract from NYC just before the DNC selected NYC for its 1992 convention site. According to the *New York Times,* "Mr. Brown has said there was no connection."
- Is a member of Patton Boggs & Blow which represents New York Life Insurance, Mutual Life Insurance, Guatemala (at a fee of $220,000 in 1991), scores of Japanese firms and American multinationals. It formerly represented BCCI.
- As chair of the DNC he raised sums in excess of $100,000 each in 1992 from RJR Nabisco, MCA, the Tobacco Institute, Sony of USA, Philip Morris and Atlantic Richfield.

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY ON MONEY & POLITICS REPORTS THAT NEARLY HALF OF THE 329 PARTICIPANTS AT THE CLINTON ECONOMIC CONFERENCE – OR THEIR CORPORATIONS – MADE DONATIONS TO THE CLINTON CAMPAIGN OR THE DEMOCRATS IN 1992.

Christopher, Warren

- Named secretary of state. Co-chair of the transition team. Is on the board of Lockheed. Sits on board of parent company of Southern California Edison. Lawyer for O'Melveny & Myers.
- In 1985, he aided E.F. Hutton (according to the *Village Voice)* in developing a strategy for damage control with federal agencies examining E.F. Hutton's guilty plea to defrauding banks with a check-overdrafting scheme.
- His firm represents Southern CA Edison, Bankers Trust [See **Jordan**], Lockheed, IBM, United Airlines, Occidental Petroleum, Fuji Bank and Mitsubishi. Also has represented Exxon in suits related to pollution of Prince William Sound. Lobbies for European chemical conglomerate CEFIC. Also represents the Brewers Assn of Canada and an Australian mining company.

Jordan, Vernon

- Co-chair of transition team. Lawyer for Akin, Gump Strauss, Hauer & Feld. Represents American Airlines. On board of RJ Nabisco, American Express, Bankers Trust, Union Carbide, Xerox, JC Penney, Dow Jones, Corning, Sara Lee and Revlon. Reported to be earning about $500,000 for sitting on these boards.
- Akin, Gump Strauss, Hauer & Feld represents China, Colombia, Chilean exporters, Korean foreign trade association, Matsushita, Nippon Benken Kogyo and Fijitsu. Also Assn. of Venezuelan Cement Producers and Bank of Nova Scotia. Also represents or lobbies for major oil and pipeline companies and banking interests.
- Jordan got his $50,000 a year job on RJR Nabisco board after he left the Urban League. RJR and Philip Morris have given $4.4 million to the UL since 1989. RJR aggressively markets cigarettes to black Americans and, as of August, was the highest corporate contributor ($301,000 through the corporation, affiliates and individuals) to the Clinton campaign.
- Jordan, who is an invitee of the hyper-secret fraternity meetings of America's male elite at Bohemian Grove, headed DC mayor Kelly's transition team in 1990, The subsequent government has been widely criticized and two years later is facing a record-breaking deficit. At the time of his appointment it was revealed that Jordan had not voted in several of the past six DC elections. WAMU commentator Mark Plotkin reports that he didn't vote in the 1992 fall primary either.
- The *Village Voice* has reported that in 1987 Jordan was part of an investor group that received $765,000 for withdrawing its bid for DC radio station WGMS. Jordan had told the FCC that he would work 40 hours a week as the WGMS news and editorial director while retaining his $300,000/year job as a lawyer. The minority investor group's withdrawal for a fee

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became known as "filing for dollars" and was described by one former FCC official as a "national scandal."

Kantor, Mickey

- Named US trade representative. Organized Clinton's pre-inaugural economic conference. Campaign chair. Conducted a briefing to law clients and prospective clients on the Clinton presidency.
- Partner in Manatt, Phelps, Phillips & Kantor,. He has represented Philip Morris, Occidental Petroleum, Martin Mariatta and Atlantic Richfield. His firm has represented GE,, United Airlines, and NEC.
- According to the *Village Voice,* the firm also represents Anees Mansour Wadi, an Iraqi national who the feds say played a central role in Iraq's military procurement effort. Alleged to have set up front company that purchased Matrix-Churchill, identified by the British government as having provided Iraq with equipment to make important weapons. US government has frozen Wadi's assets including a $3.5 million Beverly Hills home and accounts at 11 banks.

Kemble, Penn

On transition team with responsibility for USIA. Enthusiast of the Contras. Reports the *Nation*'s David Corn: "His Friends of the Democratic Center in Central America [aka Prodemca] lobbied for military aid to the rebels while funnelling National Endowment for Democracy funds to anti-Sandinista outfits in Nicaragua... Some of Prodemca's dollars flowed from far-right foundations; others came from Carl "Spitz" Channell, the conservative fundraiser" who helped North fund Contras privately and targeted anti-Contra Democrats. "In 1987 Channell pleaded guilty of conspiring to defraud the US government." Kemble also headed the hawkish Coalition for a Democratic Majority which conducted, among other things, a campaign against Paul Warnke when Carter nominated him as arms negotiator.

McLarty, Thomas 'Mack'

- CEO, Arkansas Louisiana Gas. Named White House chief of staff. Member of transition planning board
- McLarty recused himself from discussions on the RTC during the transition period because the RTC is suing Arkla for $535 million for its role in the S&L affair. Arkla bought controlling interest of a company that had just sold a failing S&L.
- Under McLarty, Arkla embarked on a series of leveraged buyouts of gas distribution firms that ran the company's debt up to $2.3 billion and created the largest multistate natural gas distribution system in the country. A share of the troubled company plunged some 70% in the two years before 1992 and dividends were cut in 1992 by some 74%.
- Ran a chain of Ford dealerships for 15 years.

O'Leary, Hazel

- Named secretary of energy. Until recently was chief lobbyist for a major private utility, North States Power of Minnesota.
- O'Leary led the utility's efforts to store radioactive waste in metal containers outside its Red Wing nuclear reactor, which is situated in the Mississippi River plain. The state has approved the plan but the issue is still in court.
- O'Leary led the utility's efforts to gain permission to burn PCB-contaminated oil at another plant. The permit was granted but later blocked by the state legislature.

Plesser, Ronald

Deputy director of the transition planning group for science and technology with responsibility for the FCC. Plesser is a lobbyist who has close ties to a wide range of commercial data companies. According to the Taxpayer Assets Project, Plesser "is considered a key architect of Reagan administration efforts to privatize" the distribution of government information, including restrictions on access to data bases and restrictions on the type of information distributed to libraries. Plesser represents the Information Industry Assn., the Direct Marketing Assn, Mead Data Central and Knight Ridder.

Reich, Robert

Named secretary of labor. Economist and professor at the Kennedy School. Author of *The Work of Nations.* A report by the Center for Public Integrity described his philosophy as a belief that "the US government should pursue policies aimed at making investments in the US as attractive as possible to the world's leading corporations.... On the cover page of the February 9, 1992, *New York Times Book Review,* Reich penned an unusual editorial that stridently denounced Michael Crichton's recent novel *Rising Sun.* According to Reich, Crichton's work of fiction is 'the latest, and least subtle, of a great tide of recent books demonizing the Japanese. . .books that blend fiction and nonfiction as they conjure up a Japan intent on controlling America."

AND ONE WHO DIDN·T MAKE IT

Garry Mauro, Texas Land Commissioner, was Texas campaign manager for Clinton and thought to be in line for a top appointment. In December, Mauro announced that he had made a personal bankruptcy filing, with $3.4 million in bad real estate investments. These investments are currently held by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. and the Resolution Trust Corp.

Riley, Richard

- Named secretary of education. Former governor of South Carolina. Lawyer for Nelson, Mullings, Riley & Scarborough, which represents BMW, ThermalKEM (a German-owned toxic waste company being sued by the feds for its disposal of toxins) and Philip Morris.

Rubin, Robert

- Named assistant to the president for economic policy. Heads Goldman Sachs. Rubin and friends helped to raise $1.5 million for Clinton in just two fundraisers in spring of 1992.
- Goldman Sachs is an investment banking firm that has helped to arrange foreign takeovers of American companies. Sumitomo Bank is a major stockholder of GS, which is the only American firm authorized to trade on Tokyo's bond markets. In 1991, GS agreed to pay $20 million to investors in a case involving a bank failure.
- The *Washington Post* reported in December, "Even before the 1980s boom for investment banking, Robert E. Rubin... was dubbed one of Wall street's 'four horsemen,' the stock arbitrageurs who were betting millions of dollars on the outcomes of corporate takeover battles."

Wharton, Clifton

Named deputy secretary of state. CEO of TIAA-CREF, the largest pension fund in America and the third largest life insurance company, a job for which he is paid $1 million annually. On the board of Ford and the New York Stock Exchange. His wife sits on the board of Phillips Petroleum, Kellog and Gannett publications.

Tyson, Laura D'Andrea

Named chair of Clinton's Council of Economic Advisors. Wrote *Who's Bashing Whom [1992]* in which, , according to the *New York Times*, she "strongly advocates... subsidies to industries that are developing new technologies, especially if

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other governments are doing the same; tougher trade tactics and channeling money into commercial research.

"What is beginning to draw attention is her long-standing relationships with Silicon Valley companies that stand to benefit from the policies she advocates. The Berkeley Roundtable on the International Economy, which Professor Tyson has helped found.. and now serves as a co-director, is a trade and technology research institute at the University of California that has received research money both from individuals companies and trade organizations."

WEATHER REPORT

Just politics

The Nation reported recently that some major members of the single-payer healthcare coalition are backing down in the fact of the Clinton juggernaut for "managed competition," whatever that really is. The UAW and AFSCME say they won't take part in any public demonstration for a Canadian-type system but will work "inside" the Clinton administration to influence it. Others wavering or indicating that they will not oppose the Clinton approach include Senators Wellstone and Boxer.

The news from the hinterlands is somewhat different. For example, a survey of Maine doctors found that 57% preferred a single-payer system. (That's really not that surprising when you consider that if Clinton has his way they'll probably all end up working for an HMO run by, say, General Motors or some former S&L entrepreneur).

Ironically, Maine's big senator, George Mitchell, has recently introduced "pay or play" legislation, along the lines of Clinton's campaign proposals. Joe Ditre of the Maine People's Alliance doesn't think much of the measure, calling it a "softball for insurance companies."

"I've never quite understood this whole employer-based health care," Maine's Rep. Tom Andrews told the *Casco Bay Weekly*. "It's almost like calling the fire department when your house is on fire, and them asking 'Where do you work?' before they come."

Meanwhile, in a letter to the *New York Times*, a couple of doctors who represent Physicians for a National Health Program attacked that paper's support of a health care program based on "managed competition." Pointing out that the phrase itself is an oxymoron, the physicians noted that the editorial "fails to mention any grass-roots demand for managed competition. That is, of course, because there is none... The only strong support for managed competition comes from insurance executives and a smattering of Washington policy wonks and business school professors who thought it up."

The impression you get from the media is that the public is desperate to cut the deficit. According to a Gallup poll in November, it just ain't so. 53% said stimulating economic recovery was the first priority; only 35% listed the deficit. When asked what should be done if Clinton has to compromise on his economic plans, the first choice (44%) was "postpone reducing the deficit."

Little noted in the Bush debacle was the fact that Bush carried nearly two thirds of the nation's farm counties. Clinton got 36% and Perot only carried one county. In Clinton-style politics that may not be good news for farmers.

And what do women think are the most important issues? According to a poll by *Women's Voices,* American women listed these issues in the following order: guaranteed health insurance, pay equity, and employment discrimination. Following, and close together, were family leave, day care financial assistance, preventing violence, continuing education assistance, increasing the minimum wage, job training, child care tax credits and after school programs.

SO YOU THINK CLINTON'S A MODERATE: Virginia governor Doug Wilder says he will press for legislation limiting handgun purchases in his state to one per month per person.

Good news

- Illinois has become the first state in the union to guarantee homeless people the right to register and vote.
- The Fully Informed Jury Association polled over 3900 candidates for state legislative seats in 19 states on support for the principle that juries have the right to judge both the law and the facts. Of the 20% who responded, 87% said yes. 30% were Democrats; 44.5% were Republicans.
- Outgoing GOP congressmember Vin Weber told a group of Minnesota conservatives: "The battle to outlaw abortion has stalled... For the time being, [the nation] has resolved the issue -- not to my liking -- but we have to face the facts."
- The mayor of Grand Rapids has stood up for local peace and autonomy, writing both political parties that presidential visits entail security arrangements "that only the most despotic and most insecure reigning monarchs left in the world would require." Said Mayor John Logie, "I cannot accept that it is required to interdict all traffic to allow [a candidate] to proceed uninterrupted from the airport to his destination. Nor do I accept that a 48-car motorcade is considered necessary." Logie says he has no

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hope of reform but suggests that candidates at least pay the costs involved or, in the alternative, "stay home."

Furthermore. . .

• His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi recently took out a quarter page ad in the *Washington Post* to propose that DC contract with his operation to end crime in the city. He said that "through the traditional knowledge of the frequency and sound in the ancient Vedic literature, it is possible to transform the atmosphere of a city from stressful and disorderly to harmonious, orderly, and balance." For only $144.8 million a year "We will place a task force of coherence-creating experts in the city. These experts have been trained to create a powerful influence of harmony, balance, and positivity in the atmosphere, and thereby neutralize criminal tendencies." There's only one catch: he wants to be paid in advance.

• TV stations are required to show educational programs for children. Here, from the Center for Media Education and the Georgetown Law School, is some of the proof submitted by broadcasters:

LEAVE IT TO BEAVER: "Good-doer Bucky fights off the evil toads from aboard his ship... Issues of social consciousness and responsibility are central themes of the program."

SANTA CLAUS IS COMING TO TOWN: "Answers some of the mysteries, myths and questions surrounding the legend of Santa Claus."

• Cecil Rhoades, who played a seminal if posthumous role in events leading up to the election of Bill Clinton, believed in "the ultimate recovery of the United States of America as an integral part of the British empire" as part of his plan to "render wars impossible and promote the best interest of humanity." Rhoades' will provided for two scholarships for each American state and territory. At the time that would have meant 100 American scholarships and only 60 for the whole British empire. Apparently, according to one biographer, "he believed there were still only the original 13 states in the union of America."

• Those concerned about the effect on military morale of making it legal to be gay and in the armed services might wish to note that nine Marine officers face charges for a Nov. 10 incident in a crowded Spanish restaurant. According to the *Washington Times*, "The officers are accused of grabbing one woman's breasts, looking under another woman's skirt and baring private parts." One offender was a lieutenant colonel.

• Children's Television Workshop is anxious for everyone to know that it has no intentions of killing off Ernie on *Sesame Street*. The rumor has been rife for several years.

• And now a final word from J. Danforth Quayle, Vice President of the United States: "People that are really very weird can get into sensitive positions and have a tremendous impact on history."

FEEDBACK

John Oravec of the A.J.Leibling K Street Drinking Club in Washington DC writes:

So you're still tuned in to the Gennifer Flowers tapes. Some editors will do anything for a sexual turn-on. Others are merely naive. Most editors were turned off the day the tapes were aired at Gennifer's press conference in New York. I tried to listen myself, but fell off my stool chortling when I spotted Dick Tuck on the dais. Good ole Dick has not lost his touch. Eight months later, you obviously are not aware that Tuck [parading as Dr. Stanley Duck, voice analysis expert --ed] authenticated those tapes. Embarrassing, is it not? It was not widely picked up, particularly by news outlets that got suckered.

Responding to your closing paragraph: I say yes, we the people can be trusted with the consummate truth. But we don't trust editors who dispense half-truths.

We agree that just because it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and talks like a duck doesn't necessarily mean that it is Dr. Stanley Duck. The duck we mentioned, however, was named Stephen Laub of Truth Verification Labs of New York. We admit that perhaps he, too, could be Dick Tuck but it is unlike the Master to push a good thing too far.

Besides, Clinton himself gave the tapes quasi-verification by calling Mario Cuomo to apologize for what was on one of them, not to mention the other matters we cited in the article.

The thing we don't understand is how a disciple of AJ Liebling, author of that great chronicle of southern gubernatorial folkways, *The Earl of Louisiana,* could find this story so unbelievable. Unless, of course, he's really George Stephanopoulos.

Responding to our recent articles on reforming our electoral practices, Zolten Ferency of East Lansing writes that "instead of just lamenting the situation, progressive and reform forces are taking action which will go a long way towards remedying the malaise here in Michigan." Specifically, Ferency -- who was head of the state Democratic party in the 60s and ran for governor several times -- is leading a petition drive for a constitutional amendment that, among other things would establish a unicameral legislature composed of anyone from each of 16 legislative district who receives at least 5% of the vote. Each member's vote in the legislature would be weighted according to the percentage of the total votes received by the legislator, a unique and creative approach to proportional representation *[ProRev Nov 92].* Ferency can be reached at PO Box 6446, East Lansing MI 48826.

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ROADSIGNS

Children

Number of children living in poverty, 1991: 14.3 million

Decline in median income of young families headed by a parent under 30 from 1973 to 1990: 32%

Drugs

Number of drug arrests resulting from aerial surveillance of the US-Mexico border, which has used 4 blimps, 130 aircraft and 960 fulltime employees at a cost of $500 million in 1991: 0

Ecology

Cost of embalming the spent nuclear reactor from a submarine: $40 million.

Life of a rechargeable battery compared with a conventional one: 400 times longer.

Amount federal government spends annually on non-recharable batteries: $123 million.

Amount federal government would have to spend if it used rechargeable batteries: $15 million.

Economics

Percent of persons laid off in previous recessions who did not expect to return to their former positions: 44%.

Percent of persons laid off in this recession who do not expect to return to their former positions: 85%

Number of metropolitan areas that still have jobless rates more than one-thired higher than when the recession began: 77

Foreign affairs

Number of submarines the former Soviet Union has sold to Algeria, Iran, Libya and Syria: 16

Number of the 6,546 applications filed between 1979 and 1991 for surveillance of alleged foreign agents in the US by the FBI or NSA denied by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court: 0

Health

Number of Americans earning $25,000 to $50,000 who lost their health insurance last year: one million

Living

Number of hours annually spent by Americans standing in line: 37 billion.

SOURCES

CHILDREN: Children's Defense Fund; DRUGS: *Tulsa World;* ECOLOGY: *Wall Street Journal; Maine Times* and Barry Commoner; ECONOMICS: Americans for Democratic Action FOREIGN AFFAIRS: What's News with the BTUs. LIVING: *Washington Post*

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